

**Midwest Regional Rail Passenger Initiative
Status Report
December 2006**

This report is submitted as required per Code of Iowa section 327J.3(5), "The director shall report annually to the general assembly concerning the development and operation of the midwest regional rail system and the state's passenger rail service."

Background

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) is a nine-state effort to develop an implementation plan for a 3,000-mile, high-speed rail system hubbed in Chicago. Studies done since 1996 have concluded that such a regional system, including a line from Chicago to Omaha through Davenport, Iowa City and Des Moines, is viable. Most of the system would be upgraded to allow 110 mile-per-hour service. Some low volume lines, including the Iowa portions, would be upgraded for 79 mile-per-hour service.

The nine-state coalition released an updated 2004 executive report for the system. As reported, the updated cost estimate for the Chicago to Omaha corridor, which includes a branch to Quincy, Ill., is \$638 million for infrastructure and \$167 million for rolling stock. These costs are higher than first estimated in 1998 and are given in 2002 dollars, (not adjusted for the cost of inflation). Operating subsidies would be required during an extended start-up phase. The allocation of these subsidy costs among the various states has not been determined, and is still a subject for analysis and negotiation. Little progress on implementation is expected unless a federal funding package is passed for passenger rail initiatives. Continued congressional discussion on policy directions relative to Amtrak clouds the issue of passenger rail funding. However, Congress is expected to address passenger rail issues and funding in 2007.

Participation of the Iowa Department of Transportation in the MWRRI is authorized under Iowa Code section 327J.3.

Current Status

The ongoing work of the nine-state MWRRI steering committee is currently focusing on:

- Further efforts of system planning in preparation for a programmatic environmental analysis and getting projects ready to proceed.
- Developing support and advocating for a federal program to provide funding for passenger rail initiatives.
- Continuing to develop ideas to address ongoing institutional and long-term management issues.

The MWRRI states participate in a variety of regional and national outreach activities to encourage congressional support for a dedicated, federal passenger rail-funding program. The states have cooperated with a number of passenger rail support groups, including the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers, States for

Passenger Rail Coalition, and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. All of these support groups recognize that a strong state and federal funding partnership is essential to the development of a national passenger rail system.

Other MWRRI states are proceeding with studies and developing funding mechanisms to be ready if federal funds become available. These steps will also be required for the development of Iowa's portions of the system. To date, Iowa funds have not been appropriated for system engineering, design, environmental assessment, construction, or operation.

A copy of the recently released *Midwest Regional Rail System, Executive Report, September 2004* on the MWRRI is available at www.iowarail.com.

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